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WITTGENSTEIN AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Meeting 10: Thursday 9 April 87

Topic: 'Will' and 'Willing'

So far we have been focusing upon those things that Wittgenstein has to say which are relevant to the topic of 'mind' broadly conceived, and we've looked at some of the logico-grammatical treatments of mental concepts, or at least those concepts traditionally subsumed under the general heading of the 'mental': 'understanding', 'intending', 'thinking', 'meaning', and so forth. And what I want to do today is to pick up on another theme that is relevant to the philosophy of the social sciences out of the later Wittgenstein, which is the concept of 'will' and 'willing'.

The sort of discussion that Wittgenstein gives us is not, as is his practice, clearly connected to established ways of theorizing within psychology or the social sciences, although now and again he mentions people like William James, and others, in connection with his discussion of the 'mind' and the 'mental'. And you might think that what he has to say about 'will', the 'will', and 'willing' is a little bit sort of disconnected from current interests, that his remarks upon 'free will', and 'determinism', the 'voluntary' and the 'involuntary', 'causes' and 'reasons', and so forth, connect up with a set of traditions that are

primarily philosophical, and don't spill over very much into at least the contemporary human sciences. But this is not, in fact, the case, because there's quite a lot of renewed and vigorous interest in the notion of "the will", as you will see if you have a look at John Searle's recent book *INTENTIONALITY*, and if you also consider the controversy that's been sparked off around the Kornhuber experiments in neuroscience. Particularly as discussed by Sir John Eccles and Eric Harth, also by Searle, although, of course, Searle is a philosopher and not a psychologist, but, of course, as usual in these contemporary debates in the human sciences, everybody pitches in, and it doesn't matter what department you belong to.

The Kornhuber experiments were essentially conducted in the following way: A number of subjects were brought into a room, and electrodes were strapped onto their heads, localized around that part of the skull underneath which there is an area identified as the left parietal area, wherein neural activity is connected up with the flexing of fingers, and the movement of finger muscles. And what the Kornhuber team were interested in doing was telling the subjects to flex their right index finger at will, and so they waited until the subjects did this. Actually they were taking constant readings, and they made specific notice of the evoked potential on the occurrence of the finger flexings by the subjects. And what they found, to cut a very long and very technical story very short, is that there is a particular sort of rising electrical activity a few milliseconds prior to the actual flexing of the finger, and they speak of this rising electrical potential as the "readiness potential". And they speak of it as the neurological equivalent, or correlate of an act of "will". Eccles, for example, is quite adamant about the claim that neurophysiologists can concretize an otherwise odd sort of notion, an otherwise problematic notion, in this sort of way. Although Eccles changes his conceptualization of the neural correlate between two different publications. In the first publication he characterizes the "readiness potential" as corresponding to the act of will, and in the subsequent publication, with Sir Karl Popper, called "The Self and its Brain", he characterizes it as the *CONSEQUENT OF* an act of will. So they are not quite clear about the timing of the act of will. But nonetheless they are pretty sure that there is something called "willing" going on, and there's something in the brain that's correlated with it. So that's one particular sort of thing

going on now, the controversy over the Kornhuber experiment, and the interpretation of the relationship between the act of will and the finger flexing.

Then we have the broader concern, that is still lively, the concern for deterministic accounts of human behavior, currently under the impact of "artificial intelligence" kinds of concepts, referred to as "sentient automata theory", the notion that human beings are basically sentient automata, they are like biological machines, and nobody thinks of construing machines as having a 'will', except in some purely metaphorical sense. And the idea is that human beings can- their behavior can be given a completely deterministic sort of explanation, which does away with any reference to things like 'freedom of the will', 'willing', and so on. And, indeed, tends to collapse the distinction between 'voluntarily', and 'involuntarily' doing things. And that is, of course, contrasted to those who want to maintain that there is something unique about human beings, as indeed biological organisms, but as also 'persons' in that it makes sense, and it is intelligible to say of them, at least some of the time, that they do things of their own free will.

Ok. So the thing is still alive. Now what does Wittgenstein have to say that speaks to the issue? As usual, Wittgenstein is interested in bringing our concepts back to earth, looking at how they are actually used PRE-theoretically. The argument being that we really can't be sure we know what we're talking about until we've analyzed the logic of actual use of the words that we want to treat in some theoretical context. And so what he does is he has a look at how words like "willing", "voluntary", and how that cluster of concepts actually gets used in everyday language-games, practical contexts.

However, when one looks at his treatment of these matters in the BROWN BOOK, which as you know is the precursor to the PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, and then at the full fledged treatment in the PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS itself, one finds some differences. In the BROWN BOOK, the topic is raised around pages 150 through 152, though there are a couple of other allusions to it elsewhere in the treatment. And I guess you can find the guts of the thing on page 151 where he says:

I think the prototype of the act of volition is the experience of muscular effort. [Tr: BROWN BOOK, p. 151]

And the rest of the discussion around these pages is an attempt to make that argument: "I think the prototype of the act of volition is the experience of muscular effort".

In the PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS the discussion is picked up around paragraphs 611. through to 622-623. And at paragraph 613., one can already see a difference in Wittgenstein's assessment of the concept of 'will', or 'willing'. He says in 613.:

613. In the sense in which I can ever bring anything about (such as stomach-ache through over-eating), I can also bring about an act of willing. In this sense I bring about the act of willing to swim by jumping in the water. Doubtless I was trying to say: I can't will willing; that is, it makes no sense to speak of willing willing. "Willing" is not the name of an action; and so not the name of any voluntary action either. And my use of a wrong expression came from our wanting to think of willing as an immediate non-causal bringing-about. A misleading analogy lies at the root of this idea; the causal nexus seems to be established by a mechanism connecting two parts of a machine. The connexion may be broken if the mechanism is disturbed. (We think only of the disturbance to which a mechanism is normally subject, not, say, of cog-wheels suddenly going soft, or passing through one another, and so on.)

614. When I raise my arm 'voluntarily' I do not use any instrument to bring the movement about. My wish is not such an instrument either.

615. "Willing", if it is not to be a sort of wishing, must be the action itself. It cannot be allowed to stop anywhere short of the action." If it is the action, then it is so in the ordinary sense of the word; so it is speaking, writing, walking, lifting a

thing, imagining something. But it is also trying, attempting, making an effort, - to speak, to write, to lift a thing, to imagine something, etc..

616. When I raise my arm, I have NOT wished it might go up. The voluntary action excludes this wish. It is indeed possible to say: "I hope I shall draw the circle faultlessly". And that is to express a wish that one's hand should move in such-and-such a way. [Tr: PI, paragraphs 613. - 616]

All right. Let me stop there and range over these remarks, and try to pull out some themes, and then we'll connect-up with the subsequent paragraphs.

Back in the BROWN BOOK he's saying: "I think the prototype of the act of volition is the experience of muscular effort". And here he's wedded in some sense to the notion that 'willing' is like a kind of 'trying'. And this is the sort of case that he makes there. In the PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, when he says: "Willing" is not the name of an action; and so not the name of any voluntary action either." [Tr: PI paragraph 613.], we're beginning to see some distance from this notion. "When I raise my arm 'voluntarily' I do not use any instrument to bring the movement about. My wish is not such an instrument either." [Tr: PI, paragraph 614.]. "When I raise my arm, I have NOT wished it might go up." [Tr: PI, paragraph 616.]. And then at 622.: "When I raise my arm I do not usually TRY to raise it." And yet one can say on occasion that somebody has raised his arm voluntarily.

Ok. So where are we then with 'willing'? If it is not something like 'trying', and it's not something like 'wishing', maybe then it's something like 'deciding to'. If one decides to do something, one can be said, under certain circumstances, to have decided to do it without being under duress. It can be said of one that it is a decision made of one's own free will. But the notion of 'willing' as it is actually used in everyday life still hasn't been given a specification. What we're doing, and what Wittgenstein is here involved in, is construing 'willing' as some kind of process, or operation, and then searching around through the language to see if he can find some kinds of notions, like

'deciding', 'trying to', 'wanting to', 'wishing to', that he can settle on as having a strict equivalence, and in that sense bring the notion down to earth. And yet, every time he tries to find an ordinary expression to which he can settle on as a strict equivalence, he finds that there are dis-analogies. He finds that he can't stay with them. He finds he encounters contradictions. So, for example, whilst it might make perfect sense to say of someone that he raised his arm voluntarily, that he did it of his own free will, only in very special circumstances does it make sense to say that he "tried" to raise his arm, and succeeded in doing so. And those circumstances would usually be ones in which there was some sort of impediment, in which something was stopping him, so a particular effort had to be made.

Now if one wants to say that there's a difference between someone raising his arm, and his arm going up, Wittgenstein speaks of the case in which:

I place myself sideways close to a wall,
my wall-side arm hanging down
outstretched, the back of the hand
touching the wall, and if now keeping
the arm rigid I press the back of the
hand hard against the wall, [JC: we've
all done this as kids, right?] doing it
all by means of the deltoid muscle, if
then I quickly step away from the wall,
letting my arm hang down loosely, my arm
without any action of mine, of its own
accord begins to rise; this is the sort
of case in which it would be proper to
say "I FIND my arm rising". [Tr: BLUE
AND BROWN BOOKS, p. 151]

Right? Your arm goes up, you haven't raised your arm, but your arm goes up. He says at 621.:

621. ... when 'I raise my arm',
my arm goes up. And the problem arises:
what is left over if I subtract the fact
that my arm goes up from the fact that I
raise my arm? [Tr: PI, paragraph 621.]

And he feels that he wants to say the difference between the cases in which he raises his arm and the cases where his arm goes up, in that kind of child-like experimentation, that the difference is, in the one case, in the case of raising his arm, the difference is the presence of an act of

willing, or an act of volition. So he wants, I think, to get us to answer that question, when he says: "when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up. And the problem arises: "What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?". What I think he wants us to do is indeed succumb to the temptation and say the difference in the one case, the case of my raising my arm, is the presence of an act of volition, or something like willing it to go up. But then, of course, what he's going to do is to try to undermine that.

The first move he makes is at 622.:

622. When I raise my arm I do not usually TRY to raise it. [Tr: PI, paragraph 622.]

So ONE candidate for WILLING your arm to go up is TRYING to raise your arm and succeeding, but that's true only for certain very special circumstances. Only in those sorts of circumstances where something is preventing you, or there's some sort of particular impediment.

623. "At all cost I will get to that house." - But if there is no difficulty about it - CAN I try at all costs to get to the house? [Tr: PI, paragraph 623.]

In other words, it only makes sense to speak of 'trying' where there is some prospective difficulty. But cases in which there is some difficulty, or impediment, are obviously not the total class of cases in which people can be said to be raising their arm, as distinct from having their arm go up. So it makes no sense to try to extend the notion of 'trying' and succeeding to ALL cases of raising one's arm. So the first candidate for 'willing', a kind of mental 'trying', a mental 'effort', falls by the way.

'Deciding', 'wanting', 'wishing' - all of these notions - 'wanting my arm to go up', 'wishing that my arm would go up' - all of these cases have particular circumstantial occasionality for their intelligibility. They are NOT circumstances that are generic to those cases in which it can be said of us that we raise our arms.

So, as he goes through his cluster of analyses of 'trying', 'deciding', 'wanting', and 'wishing', he shows you, very clearly, that they have only occasional, circumstantially bounded relevance to action-verbs: 'raising one's arm', 'going to one's home', doing whatever one may be doing.

So, what he ends up saying, or actually not saying in so many words, but getting us to see, is that in the notion of 'willing', as a particular sort of mental operation, or perhaps occult kind of cerebral going-on, what we are doing is we are extrapolating the notion of an act of volition, or a voluntary act, or an act of will, from its ordinary kinds of circumstances of use, figuring that it's that that makes the difference between our saying of an action that it is done voluntarily, and our noting of an event that it comes off involuntarily.

So the thing goes like this: We start out with the general dichotomy of "WILL" and "CAUSE" in relation to human behavior. We connect the relevance of the notion of 'will' to that class of actions which are voluntary, and the notion of 'cause' to that class of bodily goings-on, like one's arm going up, which are INvoluntary - we call them "behavioral events". The notion of 'will' here is a particular theoretical notion. It now needs to be thought of in terms of what it could mean when you try to give it an exposition in terms of ordinary, everyday language. What kinds of candidates are considered? Wittgenstein considers 'trying' exercising some effort. An act of volition is the experience of muscular effort. 'Wanting to', 'wishing to' - more or less equivalent, but not quite a synonym - 'deciding to'. And as he ranges through these predicates, these concepts: 'trying', 'wanting to', 'wishing to', 'deciding to', in respect of those actions that can be called "voluntary", he always comes across the fact that they require very specific sorts of circumstances to be applicable. And they do not range across the whole array of cases of voluntary conduct. Only in very certain circumstances do we speak of people 'trying' to raise their arms. Not all cases of raising their arms voluntarily are cases in which they try to. Not all cases in which they raise their arms, as distinct from their arms going up, are cases in which it makes sense to say of them that they have 'decided to' do it. For example, you might do that [Tr: JC raises his arm], and I might say "Yes, Caesar", and then you ask me a question [Tr: Caesar is a member of the seminar]. And it makes

very little sense to say "Did you decide to raise your arm?". You neither decided nor didn't decide; you raised your arm. It was a voluntary thing you did. It's not as if you pressed your arm against the wall, and it went up, that being the involuntary case. Same with 'wishing to' and 'wanting to', very special kinds of circumstances have to be present for these predicates properly to apply. And yet we want to say that raising one's arm is DIFFERENT in some fundamental sense from one's arm going up. And Wittgenstein asks: What happens when you subtract the one from the other? And he wants to say: Well you're left with, in the case of raising one's arm, it being a WILLED action, a voluntary action. And in the involuntary case there is no such thing. But now he's trying to get us to see what 'willing' could mean. And he's having all kinds of problems with it. In fact, he ends up being quite unable to MAP any of these predicates onto the class of actions which are voluntary, because in each case he finds particular constraints have to be satisfied.

Now he makes the revolutionary move which is to DENY that the class of actions can be neatly dichotomized into the "voluntary" and the "involuntary", and to claim that the application of the predicate 'voluntary' is itself circumstantially restricted. In that way he's beginning to make a crucial move to the solution of the problem.

Let's consider it again. We've all been sucked in - Wittgenstein himself is sucked in - to the idea that my raising my arm, as distinct from my arm going up, is a voluntary act. And it seems Ok to say it. But we haven't brought the term from its theoretical to its ordinary home. So consequently, we may well be violating, or over-extrapolating from the logical grammar of the concept of 'voluntary'. So we may have not made the full analysis. And this is, of course, what Wittgenstein goes on to argue. How does he argue it? Well, it's a characteristic Wittgensteinian move that you are all familiar with. What he says is: Under what sorts of circumstances would we ordinarily say of someone who raises his arm that he's raised it voluntarily?

Now, let's take the case of Caesar's asking me the question. He sticks up his hand. "Caesar did you raise your hand voluntarily?" What is the implication of that question from me to Caesar, when he's raised his hand?

Caesar Mavratsas: You are really asking me if I really wanted to ask you a question.

Jeff Coulter: Ok. Try to think it through as if it actually happened. You raise your hand and I say "Did you do that voluntarily?". What does it presuppose in an actual case?

Dave Bogen: That perhaps it was a reflex action, maybe something else was going on that he got hit in the elbow, or something like that, so that it was caused and that it doesn't have its ordinary sense which would be something like "I have to ask you a question". So it's about the sense of the action. {JC: all right} I mean we could dream up first cases, or something like that, otherwise it's nonsense.

Caesar Mavratsas: It wouldn't make sense to ask that question in the first place.

Jeff Coulter: It doesn't make any sense UNLESS...?

Lena Jayyusi: There's some constraint.

Caesar Mavratsas: Unless you think it's possible to ask a question by raising my hand, you won't interrogate me, right?

Jeff Coulter: Mmmh. We're stretching and straining here. Doesn't it strongly presuppose that there is something ODD about your having raised your hand? {CM: yeah} At least THAT, right? If I say "Did you do that voluntarily?", doesn't it presuppose there is something odd about your having done it?

Dave Bogen: It's just not a routine hand-raising. {JC: Yeah!} You might have a joke going on beforehand that somebody is forcing him to ask questions now or something.

Jeff Coulter: Yeah. "Did you dress that way voluntarily Dave?" That could come off as an insult, right?

So, Ok. The first set of considerations around the predicates 'voluntarily', or 'voluntary' in respect of actions is that its circumstances, or rather its circumstantial home in PRAXIS, in language-games is restricted. And it is restricted INDEPENDENTLY of the range of possible uses of action-verbs. In other words, not every action-verb can combine intelligibly in any

circumstance with the concept of 'voluntary' simply because it's not involuntary. In other words, one of the first moves to be made is to see that something, some action, some events, some behavioral event, that is NOT INvoluntary, does not mean that it is voluntary. So, something that's not involuntary does not mean voluntary, and naturally we tend to think that it might have sense because we're used to - and the formal logicians are the biggest bug-a-boo's on this one, and don't forget Wittgenstein is doing his auto-critique all the time - is the notion of 'opposites', the notion of 'the opposite'. Voluntary is the opposite of involuntary. I mean we have this thing at school where we have to go through opposites. It's very, very misleading; it's bad logical grammar, though it might be good for pedagogy for certain purposes. SO, it's not as if the opposite of 'involuntary' is 'voluntary'. And therefore it's not as if you could dichotomize the whole class of behavioral events neatly into the voluntary and the involuntary, and having done so find that the voluntary actions are basically the outcome of acts of volition, or acts of will, and that the involuntary behavioral events are all the things that are caused, and we can safely leave those to the neurophysiologist, or the sociological determinists, or whichever other category of nomological theorizer we're consigning it to.

Ok. So what we need to do, he says, is we need to complicate our understanding of actions in respect of these predicates of voluntary and involuntary. And we need to start seeing that the ordinary language is much richer than that. So, we can speak of actions being NEITHER voluntarily done, NOR involuntarily done, as in cases in which they may be obligated. You may be under an obligation to do something, neither doing it voluntarily, nor doing it involuntarily. You may be required to do something; obligated to. And there's a whole array of these kinds of concepts that we need to consider when we're considering actions.

So, what then would be one of the up-shots of this for the interpretation of the Kornhuber experiments? Just to take that as an example, though you could take a whole array of debates in philosophy of social science, philosophy of psychology, and work your way through the same kind of up-shot, I would argue, the same kind of conclusion.

Eccles says the "readiness potential" prior to the finger flexing, the voluntary finger flexing, constitutes either - depending on which book you read, which report - either a neurophysiological correlate, or a neurophysiological consequence. Harth is saying that here the Kornhuber team have DISCOVERED for the first time a neurophysiological realization of the process of willing. And Searle invokes the notion in relationship to his extended concept of 'intentional action'. Here we can see I think the kind of conceptual confusion that Wittgenstein is attempting to unravel. And the conceptual confusion has a similar sort of trajectory to the one in which he found himself enmeshed, and from which he eventually broke the chains. It goes like this: You tell the finger flexing subjects, in the experiment, to flex their fingers at will. You then extrapolate from that simple, little, ordinary, everyday command: "Do it at will", a notion of there being something like an act of will. You are also well aware of - and you are trying to minimize environmental contaminations against - any inhibitions on the finger flexings, so that the thing really isn't triggered by any sort of free floating stimuli. So it's a clear cut case. When the subject flexes it's not that he's under any specific command to flex at any given time, it's not that he's being stimulated by anything in particular, but he flexes. And SO the tendency is for us to want to say that he's flexed his finger voluntarily. It's a voluntary action. And yet, you know, there's an oddity to that, to that characterization of THAT action in THOSE circumstances.

Granted the finger flexing is not a reflex; it's not INvoluntary; it's not like a spasm. That's the first thing one could say. So you can rule out that it is indeed involuntary. That's another pressure toward us wanting to say of it that it is voluntary, because we can rule out that it's involuntary; so maybe it's voluntary. And we're also told to do it at will. So there is a lot of pressure on the notion that there is something like will and voluntariness involved here. And yet, remember that it is an INSTRUCTED action. They are told to do THAT, and nothing else, but they are not told WHEN to do it. But just because they are not explicitly told when to do it doesn't mean that they can do it any time they damn well please. It doesn't MEAN, it's not a rational way of hearing the instruction to flex your fingers at will that you say "Ok, I'll do one flex a year", or "I'll do one flex a week", or "I'll do one flex a day". There's a normative

latitude, it's a temporally bounded situation, or occasion that they are in. They are in an experiment, and the guys want to go home after the experiment to their kids, and all the rest of it. So, they don't have an open-ended latitude for the occurrence of, for the production of their finger flex. That's not to say that they have been told when to do it; they haven't been commanded to do it at such-and-such a time. But neither have they been allowed to do it whenever they damn well please. So I want to say there's a sort of normative constraint upon it. The normative constraint that arises from their rational orientation to the temporal scheduling of experiments as social structures. And these, I think, would lead us to the following sort of conclusion: That to say of their finger flexing that it was done voluntarily, that it was voluntary, and then to try to extrapolate the results to all other cases in which someone may flex their finger, just on a whim, is to make an illegitimate extrapolation, is to make an illegitimate transposition. One would want to say, I think, that in these cases the finger flexers flexed their fingers - PERIOD. Just as Wittgenstein, when he says "what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raised my arm" - and he wants us to succumb to the temptation to say: what's left over is the act of will, the act of willing. He ends up resisting it and saying: There's NOTHING that's left over. It's not that there is one thing present in that case, and one thing absent in that case that is some sort of mental occurrence, or it's equivalent, RATHER the circumstances are different. And it's the circumstances that entitle us to assign these predicates. And the circumstances are complex, and they can call forth a whole variety of different predicates, that are not restricted simply to 'voluntary' or 'INvoluntary'; willed or caused. And indeed, the lesson that he finally draws is to say that we tend for theoretical purposes to stick redundant adverbs onto action-verbs. We tend to stipulate adverbial modifiers in respect of action verbs when we're engaged in theorizing, when we're engaged in philosophy, or theory construction in the human sciences, say. And he says what we've got to realize is that there is nothing weird or odd or mysterious, or there is nothing impoverished about saying of someone that "he flexed his fingers", or "he raised his arm" - PERIOD. Neither voluntarily nor involuntarily; neither intentionally nor unintentionally - in respect of those kinds of clusters of considerations. And that whenever one

does select a predicate, an adverb, from THAT set - voluntary/involuntary, obligated, deliberately, intentionally, effortfully, and so forth - that certain circumstances have to be there OR, as he would perhaps more technically put it, certain circumstantially-bound criteria have to be satisfied. Certain criteria have to be satisfied for those things to work.

Ok. So what then is the solution to the 'free will/causal' dichotomy? The first thing is to deny that it is an exhaustive dichotomy, and to, if you like, to use a latter day term, to "deconstruct" the theorizing. So much there for the moment for 'will' and 'willing', and 'voluntariness'. Let's now move over to the other side of the board: Cause, determinism.

Eileen Crist: Before we leave the experiment, {JC: Sure, let's stop for a minute} I wanted to ask, because I haven't heard of this experiment, and I'm wondering a little bit about it's particulars, whether there wasn't something like a control experiment going on simultaneously, where you would command the person "Now raise your finger", or where you would prick the finger with a pin...

Jeff Coulter: As a matter of fact I don't think there was, just as a matter of fact I don't think there was, though it's an interesting idea. But it's the kind of thing you can imagine people would want to do under these conceptual auspices in order to try to home in on the analysis they have of the "readiness potential", as indeed having something to do with the "voluntariness" or the 'willedness'. You see, because really what they want to end up doing, certainly not Eccles but some other theorists of the Kornhuber experiment, what they want to end up doing is to argue that the "readiness potential", which is electrical activity around the pyramidal cells, that eventually hone in on those particular cells that fire and then control the muscles in the finger, what they want to end up doing, some of them, is to say that this neurophysiological evidence can be appealed to to show that EITHER "willing" is a neural event - mind-brain identity theorists - OR, they'll do something else, they'll do a materialist elimination. They'll try to argue that what this shows is that the notion of 'willing' and 'voluntariness' is an illusion, and that it's ALL determined. It's ALL neuro-physiologically CAUSED, fellas. And, Ok, neurophysiology is the queen of the social sciences after all, and all of the rest

of us can go home, because we've nothing more to do. Ok? That's another move they want to make. Neither move, of course works, and what I wanted to do is to take up the deterministic side of things, having, I hope, with Wittgenstein's help, more or less put to one side, at least for the moment, the stuff about 'willing'. We'll go onto the causal stuff.

Yeah, Dave.

Dave Bogen: Yeah I just have one question. It seemed to me that your exposition made clear a couple of points that were in the Hacker article this week as well - that is that in the first instance you can't use the logic of excluded middle - intentional/unintentional actions, voluntary/involuntary - in application to the whole class of actions.

Jeff Coulter: Lovely. Exactly right.

Dave Bogen: Ok. It would seem that you've got a class of actions for which these contrast classes are not always relevant, right? {JC: yeah}, are not always applicable. But then it pushes me to a further question which is: In what sort of cases is it relevant to talk about 'goings on' as actions? It would seem that we can now characterize all of social behavior, or all of- How is it that we are using actions to characterize things? In other words, sometimes it might be with the contrast class 'behavior', sometimes it might be as 'movement'. But then we know it's not movement, because if a cup moves that's not an action. So it's not as if we've got an invariant class, even though it happens to be a disciplinary home - the analysis of actions - we don't have a class there either it would seem. Things are not invariantly actions. {JC: Indeed.} So we get some slippage there, I mean even in the language it makes it much more difficult to talk about that.

Jeff Coulter: Yeah. Yeah. But- Absolutely, and the thing about the generic notion of 'action' is that there's now an attempt to SUBSUME the action-verbs under the generic notion of 'action', without making further finer discriminations. This is one of the problems of the Sociology of Action - it's just like the Sociology of Deviance, which has such widely varied things as sexuality, and drug abuse, and mental illness, and all the rest of it - so action too is in that book. So what you have to do is to have a look at the concepts of action without prejudice to their logical grammar. The

general notion that they may be actions is a way in, but it might not be where you end up, at the end.

Let me handle it in respect of this topic particularly, because the whole issue of action and action-concept analysis is one that we've touched on but not in any systematic way.

Dave Bogen: Let me just make sure that it's clear that- just to go into it, {JC: yeah}, because I've read Rubenstein's material a while ago, where he's going to deconstruct our notion of intentionality and unintentionality in the hopes of producing something like a different view of social action, yet he presumes that when somebody sticks their hand out of the window of a car, that that's an action. {JC: yes} Ok, that's the point.

Jeff Coulter: Yes. I understand. There's a, I think, a fallacy in Rubenstein where what Rubenstein WANTS to do, malgre soi, against his will, so to speak, but what he wants to do is still keep the notion of 'intention' as definitive of what is action. That's part of his problem, though he knows he shouldn't he wants to keep it that way. And so it crops up here and there in the paper, but we'll get onto that later.

Let's talk about the cause side of the board. I've rubbed it off [Tr: of the blackboard], but we'll have to stick it back on. ...

[Tr: tape change]

Jeff Coulter(cont.): ... or the sociological or psychological determinists, and so we're talking science. And as you know when we're talking science Wittgenstein, though he had the greatest respect for serious science, was extremely worried about making metaphysics out of science, and his analysis of the concept of 'cause', in respect of action, is particularly pertinent to this whole set of issues about the notion of the social sciences, and indeed it comes into sociology through the work of Peter Winch, primarily, in the little book THE IDEA OF A SOCIAL SCIENCE. And also Louch, EXPLANATION AND HUMAN ACTION, Taylor, there's a variety of sources that have picked up on this theme out of Wittgenstein.

Ok. Again we begin with a notion of 'cause' that is drawn from the natural sciences. The notion of 'cause' in the natural sciences is

something loosely like antecedent sufficient condition. At least this sort of Humean notion is the kind of thing that appears to be what Wittgenstein means when he speaks of 'the scientific concept of cause'. He's got in mind in particular the Humean notion, the notion of antecedent sufficient condition.

Now, we're considering human actions, and bearing in mind the caveats that Dave has raised that we don't yet really know what domain we're talking about when we're talking about all human actions, nonetheless the claim is around that neurophysiology, or some form of deterministic psychological or sociological theory could be produced which will causally explain human action. And in so doing it will lead to, of its own inner logical development, it will lead to the collapse of the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary. So, those of us who are lay folk, going about our everyday affairs, will find out that we can no longer, if we want to be scientifically precise, make the distinction between something's being voluntary and something's being involuntary, because science will have shown that for actions there are causes if only we are clever enough to find them. And the Kornhuber team can be interpreted as having attempted to, in the non-willing interpretation, they can be thought to have already begun to undermine that distinction. This is all from the other side of the blackboard - we are speaking now about the cause side. Remember we start out with the general notion 'free will' - 'determinism', 'cause' - 'will', as general explanatory constructs for human action.

What Wittgenstein argues about this is that it's not a fault of scientists, but a problem of scientists who become philosophers, or people who are writing popularizations of science. And he particularly had in mind Sir James Jeans who used to popularize astronomy and biology, and wrote books with titles like THE MYSTERIOUS UNIVERSE, etc., which Wittgenstein absolutely detested. He detested it for two related reasons, first of all being himself a serious scientist, he was an engineer, a good one, he had a proper regard for science. But it wasn't a sort of snobbery that led him to despise the popularizations, what led him to despise the popularizations of the sort that Sir James Jeans and others were putting around is because as he puts it 'they sublime science', 'they deify science'. And he's not saying that because he is wanting us to, let's say, instead deify theology, or deify anything. So what does he mean

when he is attacking this deification of science? What he's saying is this, he says: these folk who are popularizing results of the sciences, they lead us to think that the ordinary ways that we have of reasoning, and the ordinary ways that we have of describing and explaining things are now in peril, because science has shown - and his key example, one that I think I've mentioned before to you, comes out of Sir James Jeans' own book, but he's also talking about other people like Eddington, who also wrote popularizations. It's the case of the table being solid.

Sir James Jeans says look physics has shown that though you think this table is solid, in fact it's full of space. And in the spaces are tiny little atoms, and little things rolling around the atoms. So, the solidity of the table is a commonsense prejudice. In fact the table isn't really solid, it's actually got an awful lot of space, and things of that sort. It's like: though you have heard it said of old, I will now tell you it's this way.

So Wittgenstein says: Look, it's very true that the sciences can correct us on a great deal of our proto-theoretical, or pre-theoretical claims about the way the world works. No doubt that it can do that. The Copernican revolution is just a case in point, and we've discussed that. The discovery of ultraviolet and infrared light - all these things can lead us to revise and extend our grasp of the world.

But, science has to start from ordinary linguistic concepts, though it might not end up with them, it has to start with them. And insofar as it is founded upon ordinary linguistic concepts, or pre-scientific concepts, it cannot, on pain of self-contradiction, self-refutation, end up coming out the other side of its inquiries radically subverting the very concepts upon which it is basing itself. It can extend them. It can add new concepts. But it cannot kick the ground from under it in that way. And he says: in the case of causal reasoning, we have this sort of danger. The argument then begins in that sort of general way. It goes on in the following points.

He says: Given the success of causal explanations in physics and mechanics, and biology and chemistry, given the success of them, there is a tendency for us to think that the concept of cause IS the scientific concept of cause. Just as THE CORRECT description of the table is the

physicist's description of the table. And don't forget this is not being said by an anti-scientific illiterate, but at the moment it's sounding anti-scientific. He says: physics, and chemistry, and biology describe the world for the purposes of doing physics, and chemistry, and biology. And it is within those language-games that the criteria for correct and incorrect description are laid down. But there are other language-games that we play using concepts that DO NOT have their home in the scientific ones, but in these other language-games we've got to be very careful we don't, when we think of them, when we look at these other language-games, that we don't think of them as poor cousins of the scientific language-games. Not because there is no difference between science and commonsense, but because we can get the analysis of the other non-scientific language-games WRONG if we're all the time looking at them through the lenses of the scientific language-games. In other words, if we think when we look at the use of the word "cause" that the scientists have the only proper, correct way of thinking of what 'cause' amounts to, and of how to use the word, then we are going to misunderstand the notion of cause, OR we're going to be pushed toward a certain conception of inquiry in which the concept of 'cause' is going to be systematically misconstrued, because we want all the time to assimilate our use of the notion of 'cause' to the scientific uses. The scientific uses in Wittgenstein, as I said, being loosely speaking the notion of 'antecedent sufficient condition'.

Ok. If we're beguiled by the scientist's success in their deployment of the concept of 'cause', in their explanations, with all of the experimental apparatus, with all of the proofs, with all of the demonstrations, we might start to think that our ordinary, everyday uses of the concept of 'cause' in explaining our own and other people's behavior is either 1. a poor cousin, a kind of bete noir in the family of concepts, that tries to be a scientific one but can't quite make it. And it can't quite make it because what we need in order to make it scientific is a social science, is a behavioral science that will take that ordinary notion of 'cause' that we use in everyday life when we explain our own and other people's behavior and make it into a scientific one in the way in which it is used in the sciences.

And so we have the whole apparatus of multivariate analysis, causal modeling, in the social sciences, and in the biological sciences we

have the attempt at neurophysiological explanations of behavior as causal explanations.

But, he says the conjuring trick has already been done, and it's the one that set us off on the wrong foot.

The concept of 'cause' in our ordinary, everyday explanations of behavior is NOT a proto-scientific concept at all. It is, in fact, an ETHICAL concept. It's a MORAL concept. It's not a mechanical one; it's a moral one. What on earth can he mean by saying 'cause' is an ethical concept? Well, we have to give examples of the use of the word. We have to work on its logical grammar.

Let's take some examples: "I was caused to pass over the money. I was caused to do it." - said by somebody who has just handed over \$10,000 of the bank's money to a thief. What that means is, how that can be heard, is "I had no choice but to do it". We don't hear it as a sort of vernacular approximation to a neurophysiological account. We just don't hear it that way. What we hear it as, quite intelligibly, is something like "I had no choice but to...". It is, in other words, as it invokes a set of conditions, namely those circumstances, the circumstances, for example, in which somebody might have a gun pointed at someone's head, as it might invoke these circumstances, it comes off as an excuse. "I had no choice but...". It DELETES personal responsibility, and it provides that there was no rational alternative, given those circumstances. Somebody might say: "Yeah, you did have an alternative. You did have a choice. You could have allowed the gunman to blow your brains out". Well, that makes sense only as a way of remembering that there's a difference between physical coercion and a rational deliberation. It's certainly not something that was caused in the sense that one might be caused to fall down the stairs by being pushed. It was caused in the sense that there was an alternative that was no alternative. So when someone says he couldn't have done otherwise, he had no choice but to, he was caused to, what he's doing is he's exculpating himself from personal responsibility, and proposing that in those circumstances he's fully excused from having done what he did.

Now the CAUSE is accepted as an explanation only to the extent that the excuse is accepted. So we say: "Yes, Ok, I guess you were caused to do

it", is a way of accepting the excuse. Is saying: "Yes, you had no choice", but it's not no choice in some absolute sense, for example, in the way that one has no choice if one is hurled down the stairs, but to fall down the stairs. It's NOT that kind of 'no choice'. It's a no choice in the sense that there's no sensible, reasonable, rational kind of choice. So we're into the domain of appropriate, sensible, what someone can be held responsible for vis-a-vis what someone canNOT be held responsible for. What counts as a good excuse; what counts as a lousy excuse. We're into the ethical domain of action assessment.

So what can say is that when we speak, when we talk about the CAUSES of our actions, we're usually characterizing them in terms of excuses, or sometimes in terms of justifications, but more often in terms of excuses.

Ok. But what about the neurophysiological stuff? I mean, what about the Kornhuber experiment? Let's get back to the finger flexing. What are we going to make of that? That looks like you could give a neurophysiological explanation for action, after all it's an action to flex your finger. I think one would say an activity is an action, something you'd do, it's not something that happens. It's like raising your arm; it's not your arm going up. It's not a question of a spasm or a reflex, it's an action.

What are we to make then of the notion of a CAUSAL explanation of action that is NON-ethical; that is mechanical? Maybe Wittgenstein was after all simply prejudiced against scientific empiricism. Although he doesn't explicitly himself make the connection, the resources for making the connection are nonetheless there in his writings, and have been brought out most effectively, I think, by people like A. I. Melden in the book FREE ACTION. It's the distinction between the organic components of an action, and the action.

Take something like this, those of you who saw me do this one before will just have to bear with me, because I can't think of a better example off the cuff, but it goes like this: Here's an action [Tr: JC moves arm laterally away from himself]. That's an action. The bodily movements involved in that action can be described in biological terms. There's a certain operation of the flexor and tensor muscles; there's neural events taking place that can be described. Actin filaments are bending and joining and all the rest of it. If you want to

know about that Carlson's PHYSIOLOGY OF BEHAVIOR has it all mapped out for you. One can speak of the trajectory of the arm going from right to left, subtending an angle of whatever, and one can give it a description in biological terms, physiological terms. AS looked at that way, looked at as a bit of organic behavior, or a bodily movement, there's no reason whatsoever why one can't, in principle and in practice, strive to give it a neurophysiological causal explanation - no reason whatsoever. In fact, we've got some pretty good contenders around already, and maybe the Kornhuber experiment is going to be a part of that. BUT the neurophysiological causal explanation of THAT is NOT a causal explanation of the ACTION that I perform by doing THAT. The neurophysiological explanation is a causal explanation of the organic components of the action, NOT of the action, because I haven't told you what I've done yet. You don't know what I've done yet. - Well actually you do. - You know what I've done. - You know I've been giving you an example. That's one thing I've been doing. I've been giving you an example of the difference between a bodily movement, and an action. BUT the SAME bodily movement can in changed circumstances amount to wholly different kinds of actions. Change the circumstances and the SAME bodily movement that can be given a neurophysiological causal explanation amounts to the action of, let's say, checkmating your king, OR drawing a line on a map, OR - and now it's just a matter of your imagination to see how many possibilities that has as an action. Change the circumstances and you change the action, though the bodily movement, the ORGANIC component of the action remains the same, and the neurophysiological, causal explanation of the organic component of the conduct is NOT even in the SAME language-game as the explanation of the action. What does explain how I could come to checkmate your king is a whole bunch of particular, local matters having to do with chess rules, chess strategies, and the rest of it - nothing to do with the language of neurophysiology. How was it I came to give you that example has to do with a whole bunch of matters pertaining to this class, to this topic, to this point - nothing to do with neurophysiology. Nothing whatever. The explanation of the action is quite a different language-game from the - and even the causal explanation of the action, when it might be something that you could give a causal explanation for, like handing over the money - it goes like this: There's the money. There's the thief. I hand it over. Now, that's the stuff that involved

in it. Right? Ok? In certain circumstances - in any circumstance that can be given a neurophysiological, causal explanation in respect of its organic components. In certain circumstances ONLY it can be given a causal explanation in the sense of playing the ethical language-game, like "why did you do it?". "He was caused to do it, because somebody was threatening him with a gun. They were robbing the bank". So THAT gets explained as an action by reference to those contextual contingencies AND it's a causal explanation insofar as one says of the agent "He had no choice". Change the circumstances, "What is that?" - remember in the last case it was shifting the money, or handing over the money - it's getting the coal out of the bunker and shifting it over by the fireplace. Right, it's a whole array of possible things. And the bodily movement might be point-for-point identical, with a point-for-point neurophysiological, causal trajectory. And yet, as an action, it's a quite different set of things with a different set of explanations, only some of which in certain circumstances are causal, and when they are causal in those certain circumstances, they are ethical explanations. They are indeed excuses. So this generally makes the point that there is no 1:1 mapping of actions onto their organic components, therefore a causal explanation of the organic components of an action - which is what we might expect from neurophysiology - is never going to be, COULD not be - not because they are not clever enough, but because you can't - right? - you can't have a quick grief, you can't have a quick swear, anymore than you can have a ten inch pain - it's a logical impossibility - COULD NOT be an explanation of the ACTION.

Caesar Mavratsas: But they could ask, and they could bring another point in and say the bodily movement involved in different actions would be the same, but something in the brain, like in the Kornhuber experiment, like some vibrations or something are different. So you have the same bodily movement in different actions, but you do have a different process in the brain, or they have discovered something about neurons or about --

Jeff Coulter: Whatever they are going to discover about neurons is NOT going to connect up with causal explanations of ACTIONS - can ONLY connect up with causal explanations of the organic components of actions, and the two are different things, though very much related.

George Psathas: No, but the argument is that that PARTICULAR action has a neural correlate, {CM: yeah!}, the action of handing over money, which is different from the action for filling the bunker with coal. Each one of those has a different neural correlate even though you haven't found it yet. I mean that would be the extension of that logic.

Jeff Coulter: All right, well, let's imagine that there are different kinds of neural events involved in {CM: in the same bodily movement} in the same bodily movement, in different circumstances. The point now being that you can say what?

Caesar Mavratsas: I mean I wouldn't make that argument, but they could still say that in each action you have a different neurophysiological process despite the fact that you may have the same bodily movement, the same observable bodily movement. They could say that, they could keep arguing and saying that they-

Jeff Coulter: They could say what? Say it; you clearly want to say it, so say it.

Caesar Mavratsas: They could still argue that what goes on in your head or your brain causes your action - or something like that.

Dave Bogen: Or you could weaken the claim. It seems like the structure of the argument would be, in response to what you are saying, that NO it's not a matter of sufficient conditions, but necessary conditions, in lines with the organic component of action. And then the response to the first- the incommensurability of the organic with the action would be then to also notice that it works the other way around as well. For instance making that move, say, in chess doesn't mean that these physiological correlates are always going to have to be present, because you could make the same movement by telling somebody to move it for you, for instance.

Jeff Coulter: Oh well that's a case of changed bodily movements.

Dave Bogen: Well, but what I'm saying, I'm following the logic of the thing {JC: yeah, go ahead}- So in that sense you trace it back, keep pushing back on it, and you get it to something like a thought {JC: heh ha}. You see how it would work? If you are going to search for that organic

component, eventually you are going to look for it in the brain, and then you weaken the claim by saying "No it's not a sufficient condition, but a necessary condition, and it's an organic component. And it happens to be the thought now."

Jeff Coulter: Well I want to leave thoughts out of it; we got into thoughts a lot last week, and I just want to leave that, well, not out of it, but to one side of it at the moment. Partly because one would have to, by invoking that notion, argue that every action has as its antecedent some thought which has a neural correlate. And we don't even need to get into that, right, because it's mere stipulation. It's not the case for every speech-act I've been coming up with I've had an anterior thought prior to it. But let's stick with your major point which is the business of - both your points - the business of a neurophysiological explanation for action - as distinct from the organic components of action.

Now, independently of whatever you might find in the brain, and there's all kinds of weird and wonderful things going on in the brain, the question is to conceptualize possible relationships, and it's up to neurophysiologists to cash those checks empirically, or otherwise. The argument so far has basically been that NOTHING that you could find in the brain could logically count as {CM: yeah} a cause of an ACTION, but could ONLY count as a cause of the organic components of an action - no matter what that thing is, and how much it might vary. And the steps that were made were, first of all, to note that there's no 1:1 relationship between an action concept and the bodily movements that can instantiate it variably.

Caesar Mavratsas: But the point I was trying to make is that what if you find that there is a 1:1 relationship between an action and brain mechanisms, or something like that?

Jeff Coulter: But now what you want to be talking about are the causes of actions, such as his 'checkmating his king', or his 'giving an example' {CM: yeah}. But what could we mean by the causes of those actions? Under what circumstances would we say "What caused you to do that?"

Well under what circumstances?

Caesar Mavratsas: Well, I mean, if you knew how to play chess, and if you were playing the game, and you wanted to-

Jeff Coulter: I think it's an extraordinarily strange use of language to say "What caused you to checkmate my king?", UNLESS something like -- I'm not even sure I can come up with a good bunch of contextual contingencies that would make that an intelligible move in the language-game.

Lena Jayyusi: But a prior agreement that you would make sure to loose the game.

Jeff Coulter: Yeah! Lovely! You had a prior agreement that you were going to throw the game away, because people were betting behind the scenes, and could say "What the hell made you checkmate my king? What caused you to do that?". [Tr: general laughter]. And the guy might say: "Geez, well my edge has been put on in some side bets in that betting office; and hard luck. I double crossed you". OK, so there is an intelligibility to ask you..... But very, very restricted set of circumstances. And, but, it's that kind of thing that logically would count as the cause of 'checkmating the king', or whatever. For other kinds of activities, including even for that one, one comes up with things like REASONS, and -

Caesar Mavratsas: I accept all of those points, but what if a neurophysiologist found that in that move there is one, and only one brain mechanism, and tells you that what caused you to checkmate the other person's king is that brain mechanism, which you know nothing about - or something like that. I mean I wouldn't buy that argument-

Jeff Coulter: Well, I don't know how he'd be able to make the argument because the expression "what caused you to..."-- OK, let's put it this way: -

Caesar Mavratsas: Because they could still say "OH we are the scientists, and these are things that you know nothing about", and things like that.

Jeff Coulter: Yes, yes. Let's put it this way: There's something going on in the brain, and the neurophysiologists theoretical problem is to describe the possible relationship that it can have. In the case of the finger flexing, where we have this readiness potential, the, sort of, the

most neutral characterization of it is as an "enablement", or an "enabling" occurrence. It's the thing that enables you to flex your finger. But if you wanted to say that the readiness potential CAUSED you to flex your finger, what in fact could you mean by that? - that it caused you to flex your finger?

Caesar Mavratsas: It couldn't mean anything, but they could still argue that-

Jeff Coulter: No, but we still have to try and work it out; we have to try and work it through. What could it mean to say "caused him to flex his finger"? Well, first of all, it would have to mean something like that he was not responsible for flexing his finger. How's about the following scenario: I've just murdered my secretary. I'm in court. The judge is saying: B.U. professor, you go murdering your secretary. Who CAUSED you to do that?" [Tr: Answer is:] "These neurons fired at the wrong time", [Tr: general laughter], or "I went to the Biology Department to have them have a look at my brain, and they found this thing that's uniquely correlated with murdering secretaries, and they found it in my head, and that's it. I'm not responsible. You'll have to let me off. It's not my fault. It's my neurons you have to blame. You could put them in prison, but I go free." [Tr: general laughter]

Caesar Mavratsas: It's the same example given by Malcolm. I mean, say, the person who was drinking and still decides to drive and kill somebody. But he's still responsible.

Jeff Coulter: Yes. You can only be held- You see the concept of 'personal responsibility' is inimical to a concept of 'strict causality' in THIS domain. It is not inimical to a notion of 'enablement', and if you were to find unique to cases of murdering secretaries, or checkmating kings in chess, the BEST you'd probably be able to come up with is something like: It's THAT event that enables one to do it. If you insist on saying it's that event that CAUSED one to do it, then you have immediately moved into the language-games of action, with a notion of causality. And if you do that that entails, by virtue of the logical grammar of these concepts, that you have to deny responsibility, and you have to excuse, and exculpate, and you say things like "One had no choice but to..." "One could not have done otherwise...". Which are all entailed by the

notion of 'cause'.

So, I KNOW one wants to do it, I feel that it... - Why doesn't one want to do it? Because science is full of causal explanations, and, after all, it sounds very Pollyanna-ish that neurophysiologists should be denied the right to talk about a neurophysiological causation for action, but only for the organic parts of action - that sounds like a prejudice. It is NOT a prejudice in Wittgenstein's analysis, and I think he's right, but rather a result of seeing language holistically, and seeing that if you make a reform of language, or a revision, like you allow that concept of 'cause' in the domain of action to now be transposed to the neurophysiology, that there are all kinds of consequences involved in doing that; all kinds of ramifying conceptual transformations that the people who want to do that don't even consider. For example, it would have to entail that you deny that people are responsible for their actions. You'd have to totally transform the notions of appropriateness, choice, alternative. You'd have to TOTALLY transform the language of conduct, so much so that one would wonder whether it would still be identifiable as the language of conduct anymore. So whilst it might seem like a little move to make, a little concession to make, if it's done seriously, and systematically, then it carries in its way all of these consequences that one has to envisage before one tries to carry them through, and, in fact, they are not envisaged, it's idle. Because nobody could really systematically LIVE that way. We CAN'T make these conceptual transformations. We don't know what it would mean. Remember imagining a language is imagining a form of life. We don't know what it would mean in that sense. So, it is really incoherent. Its incoherence is not immediately transparent. The incoherence of the assimilation of the causal language to the language of action in neurophysiology is not immediately transparent, but it is as soon as you trace out its conceptual consequences. Unless, of course, you are simply playing with words, and anybody can play with words. People might say "I stipulate that...", "I stipulate that cause shall now mean...", but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about it really coming to mean that.

Caesar Mavratsas: Yeah, but it's what you're saying in the mental illness book that there is an epistemological gap between the language of cells, etc., and the language of action. [Tr: see Coulter, J. (1973). APPROACHES TO INSANITY.

London, UK:Martin Robertson and New York,NY:John Wiley] I agree with that, but I'm sort of trying to understand why they keep trying.

Jeff Coulter: Let's take a break, and we'll come back to that.

[Tr: break]

Jeff Coulter: Yeah, let's get into it. I've got your point. [Tr: omits] I want to go back to Caesar for a minute, and give that a completely unsatisfactory premature closure, because we'll get back to it.

But the first thing to be said is that a part of the problem that you come up against in the behavioral sciences is not just conceptual mis-assimilations, but the whole project of operationalization. Which means basically from Bridgeman onwards, it means something like you take a notion that appears to have something to do with something you can't quite see all in one go, or isn't very tangible, or a concept that seems to be a cluster concept, a complex concept, and then you want to render it manageable in respect of your experimentation, or your empirical research. So what you do is you give it a stipulated meaning for certain purposes in the hope that the stipulated meaning captures at least a part of the sense of the concept, or the grammar of the concept in Wittgenstein's sense. And that so in a sense you're taking a little bit of money out of the bank, but you're leaving the rest there to be taken out later. Or rather, let's say, you're borrowing a little bit, and you're going to pay it back later.

In the case of the behavioral sciences though, the kinds of concepts that we're dealing with are for the most part not concepts that we devise as a result of our empirical researches. They are concepts that pre-exist even the beginning of our empirical researches. And it's not as if we're all the time making empirical discoveries that require us to come up with fresh concepts, but very often we are essentially extending or refining existing concepts. Now in the case of neurophysiology, which is a discovering science, where they do make discoveries, they find things out, they encounter material phenomena that have not been encountered before as a matter of their work, though not every

day, then they might need to use new concepts, like the concept of "synapse" is a new concept in the sense of the history of our understanding that there's a brain in your skull, the concept of synapse is I guess from the early 20th century. I think Sir Charles Sherrington came up with it.

But the concept of cause is not. And it is only by stipulating a transformation of the concept that you could start to try to make the argument that you're making. But then once you've stipulated the sense of the concept, you've got to remember that that concept doesn't stand alone in language; it connects with other ones. And what are you going to make of the other ones that it connects with for its meaning? Like the concept of 'cause' connects with the concept of 'responsibility', connects to the concept of 'excuse', etc. That's not thought through.

Caesar Mavratsas: Yeah, well I'm just playing the devil's advocate.

Jeff Coulter: Yeah well that's Ok Caesar, no problem.

Caesar Mavratsas: Yeah well, basically it's the old business of a different language visions.

Jeff Coulter: Yes, exactly.

That was number 1., Number 2. is you can't mean words any old way, and if there is something in Wittgenstein that's clear it's that. You can't MEAN what you want to mean by 'cause' and still imagine that you're talking about anything like 'cause' in the ordinary sense {CM yeah}. So those are the two sorts of lines of attack that have been leveled against those who want to extend the concept of neurophysiological causation to action.

Caesar Mavratsas: What's their reply, if they have any?

Jeff Coulter: Ok. One reply would be a reply by somebody like Weil, a philosopher of science in the mid-west, in a paper called: "Intentional and Mechanistic Explanations of Action" in PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH. There's the whole area, of which he's a member I guess, or a whole collection of philosopher's of science which is one called the "compatibilists" - the notion of 'compatibilism' meaning that reason and rule-like explanations are compatible with mechanistic explanations for actions. The way they go about

this is by acknowledging a distinction between mechanical causation as a form of explanation and reasons as forms of explanations. And they accept, at least initially, that mechanical explanations as we have them so far may indeed have to be restricted to those cases of behavior that are characteristically the involuntary, the reflexological.

Caesar Mavratsas: The natural science.

Jeff Coulter: Right! But what they want to do is to make the following sort of argument, and I must confess I'm so out of sympathy with it that I find it difficult to give it a really coherent exposition, but I'll try. They want to argue that, Ok, actions are explained ordinarily by reasons, and causal explanations of actions are a sub-set of the set of reasons, namely that sub-set that are invocable in circumstances where you are giving an excuse for something under conditions of unusual difficulty, and where you're disavowing personal responsibility. They'll accept that. So, now they take on the general class of reasons. Reasons like 'intentions', 'motive', 'purposes', 'desires', 'rules', 'conventions', and the rest of it. And what they really want to say is: The giving of a reason is itself an activity, like any other activity. And like any other activity, it is therefore rule-governed. And they may use a Wittgensteinian notion of 'rule', or they may have some other notion of 'rule'. I won't get into that one just at the moment. But bear in mind the class on 'rules' when you hear this.

Ok. They say ALL conduct is rule-governed including that bit of conduct known as 'giving a reason for an action'. That too is rule-governed. There's nothing particularly privileged about the giving of a reason for an action; it too is an action. We are not in the business of competing with reasons for actions. We don't want to argue that mechanical causal accounts of behavior are now to be thought of as over-ruling the kinds of things we would ordinarily give and accept for action. They accept all of that. So, so far they seem to be friends of the court, at least of Wittgenstein's court. BUT, what they want to argue is that the rules that govern action are in some sense neurologically represented by analogy to the way in which a program, which is a set of directions, is in a computer, governs the operations of the hardware. So on the whole, in order to try to concede some of these Wittgensteinian arguments, they invoke the computer analogy for brain

functioning in this abstract sense. They are not saying we carry around little, sort of, biological versions of Atari's or Mac Plus's. Obviously it's the following notion of a computer. It's the notion of a computer as a Turing machine. A Turing machine, named after Alan Turing, who was one of the devisers of the theory computability in mathematics. A Turing machine is a finite set of rules that operates on a finite input to produce a finite output, and it can do so on any input. So a Turing machine is a mathematical specification, but insofar as it can be implemented in hardware, software, we can speak about Turing machines as virtual computers. So in the sense that there is a similarity between what the brain does for people and what computers do, insofar as both are now seen to house, in some sense, bunches of rules - or I guess they would have to say something like that they house algorithms - that generate, through the control of the electrophysiological activity of the brain - the output - to that extent we are sort of sentient automata.

Caesar Mavratsas: (It's for the words I can't say?)

Jeff Coulter: Yeah. And this is one of the ways in which compatibilism has been advanced. It seems to me that it has all kinds of conceptual problems. First of all, there's absolutely no reason why we should allow the computational theoretician to stipulate the notion of a rule of action to be algorithmic. In fact, there's every reason to believe that overwhelmingly rules of action, including depth grammatical rules of grammar, are not algorithmic. Or not in any interesting sense, or at least not in a sense that really captures how they operate in the social, cultural world. That's point one

Point two: I would want to agree with J. F. M. Hunter when he says that it doesn't even really make sense to speak of a computer as rule-following, or rule-governed in its operations. Since if you say of something that it follows rules, then it must be possible to say of it that it could on occasion break the rule. But computers don't break rules, they bloody well MALFUNCTION. So it's not like you could say that all of the concepts surrounding the notion of rule-following - their criteria are satisfied. Only some of them. So it's an analogical extension of the notion.

Caesar Mavratsas: Well you could say that computer does follow rules in the sense that the computer is the "judgmental dope" who knows which rule to apply in a given situation or time - which is not the case with human beings.

Jeff Coulter: All right, I would want to be more radical. I would want to say no they do not follow rules. Because if you follow a rule, it logically implies the possibility of breaking a rule, or of overlooking it, or forgetting where to apply it, or etc. There's a whole array of concepts that cluster around that practice insofar as to say of someone that he's following a rule means that certain criteria are satisfied in their conduct. So only by metaphorical transposition can we think of computers as rule-following. They are indeed program driven.

Now, think about the human agent. When would we say of ourselves and others that we are programmed to do what we do? If I were to say of you: "You were programmed to ask me that question", it comes off as, first of all, a bad joke, but secondly as having an implicit contrast with your asking me spontaneously. So the notion of doing something spontaneously is not one that you can sensibly apply to computers, and the notion of being programmed to do something is a derogatory kind of notion when applied to human conduct. There are all kinds of disanalogies. The whole thing, I think, is a blind alley. But it's one of the ways in which a certain conception of the description and explanation of human behavior via biological reductionism is kept alive. Which is, of course, not to say - nobody should get this wrong in any way - it's not to say that neurophysiology and biology have nothing to tell us about behavior. Of course it has an awful lot to tell us, but not in quite that way. It also, I think, establishes that the intellectual core for sociology is that action is, from ground up, without residue, a sociological concept. It's not psychological. It's not biological, though it might have some elements of each involved in its various components. Though in respect of the so called psychological, that too is not altogether clear. As we see in Wittgenstein, many of those things that we might hitherto have thought of as psychological properties: 'understanding', 'intending', 'thinking', 'having a motive', 'following a rule', 'hoping', 'expecting', and all of these sorts of things, turn out to have logical criterial relationships with social behavior in social circumstances, and are NOT simply concepts

for internal operations, states, processes, and the rest of it.

Isamu Kamada: Can I ask a question?

Jeff Coulter: Yeah, please.

Isamu Kamada: What does Wittgenstein say about causation itself, the conception of causation? I think Hume denied causation at all, because he thought it's just our association. There is something, two things, A and B, and if they are temporally and spatially close, we just connect in our association and we explain by causation. And I think that various () between Humean ideas and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein criticizes Humean skepticism (metaphysically), but still he's called a constructivist, or constructionist.

Jeff Coulter: Mmmh, I think yes. We've had that argument before, we won't take it up now. I think that's misleading, but anyway go on.

Isamu Kamada: Ok. So, what does Wittgenstein say about causation itself? Does he accept it, or deny it? It's just a social construction by our language-game, or it is something in things themselves.

Jeff Coulter: In the natural sciences?

Isamu Kamada: Yeah.

Jeff Coulter: It's not up to Wittgenstein to accept or deny these things. Don't forget he's not interested in unilaterally reforming language; he's trying to elucidate the meanings of concepts, and so on. So he begins by noting, as he would put it, by noting that that language-game is played, that language-game of causal explanation in science. That language-game is played. And when he talks about cause in the natural sciences, it seems to me from what you can glean from ZETTEL and the PI, and the various other places that what he has in mind is something roughly like the Humean conception of causality as constant conjunction of antecedent condition and effect. It's that sort of thing. Which is a good enough way of glossing causal explanations in say for the behavior of gases. It doesn't work at the subatomic level, but it's reasonable for a whole array of scientific discoveries, and claims. Now when one says Hume denied, he-

Caesar Mavratsas: He denies the Humean notion of cause.

Jeff Coulter: Yes, he denies that it is a sort of metaphysical kind of thing, like a mysterious force relating two things together. In fact seeing causality as a matter of antecedent sufficient conditions for the occurrence of an event or state of affairs is something of a demystification of a prior, pre-Humean notion of cause. And indeed there's something about Hume's notion of cause that survived through the writings of Hempel, for example, in philosophy of science, and Nagel, and Braithwaite, and Rudner, and a whole domain of the philosophy of science. Partly because it's a quite neat effective notion, but yet, as we should be alert to, the concept in the natural sciences is also a family resemblance concept. It doesn't succumb to specification in terms of a set of specific conditions for all and only all those things scientists would call "cause". That's a rough and ready cut at it. There might be circumstances in which one would use 'cause' IN scientific explanations which that doesn't quite fit. But as far as this debate is concerned, it will do. It's certainly one that handles the neurophysiological cases, say the Kornhuber case.

Isamu Kamada: Somebody writes that Wittgenstein says that to read Hume is a torture, it's too difficult to read, but Kant is trying to escape from Humean skepticism, and Wittgenstein is a sort of student of Kant.

Jeff Coulter: Sort of.

Isamu Kamada: Yeah, sort of. But Kant divided things themselves and our, how do you say, our constructed world, or language-game, if you like. So if we push that argument, or that line, we would say that Wittgenstein is thinking that things themselves are different from our linguistic community, or our ideas which are constructed by linguistic communication.

Jeff Coulter: But since he basically argues that the concepts that we have constitute what phenomena could be, if you remember he says: Grammar determines the possibilities of phenomena, then he couldn't be drawing a strict distinction between our concepts and things independent of them. Because what things are is, what things amount to is a matter of the conceptualizations we have for them. So there can't be that same

division.

I think it's important to remember that although Wittgenstein doesn't use phenomenological concepts, out of say the Husserlian tradition - though there are a couple of places where he says he's doing phenomenology of a kind, and don't forget J. L. Austin described himself as a linguistic phenomenologist - it's perhaps helpful, at least for us, for our purposes, to think of Wittgenstein's notion of grammar and it's relationship to the world in terms of the notion of 'constitution'. I don't think it's too forced a marriage of the two areas, I think it's helpful. Which is not to say that Husserl and Wittgenstein have the same kind of conception of how language relates to the world - quite different. But the notion of 'constitution' seems to me to be helpful. It's not creation, of course, it's not idealism. I'm not saying language creates the world. But constitution in the Husserlian sense.

Isamu Kamada: Yeah but Wittgenstein is saying that (), or intention, or motive are a part of action, or action itself.

Jeff Coulter: The giving of motives and reasons and intentions, the avowing and the ascribing of them are actions, activities, speech-acts, actually, just as much as any other activity.

Isamu Kamada: He's very close to Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, because exactly they are saying the same thing. Motive, and (), and intention are a part of action, they say.

Jeff Coulter: Yes, Ok. But I think a big difference is they don't show how we are to think about that, they just assert it.

Isamu Kamada: No, they are saying just look at our experience itself, and forget about the language-game.

Jeff Coulter: Right. Now the problem with doing that, of course, is you can't come up with compelling arguments that have intersubjective grip, because you hit up against the phenomenological conundrum, namely this is how it seems to me when I examine my consciousness, and yours might be different. Whereas the logico-grammatical analysis has a transpersonal power if it's properly done. That's one way of talking about it. Another way of talking about it

is to say that we'll look even the phenomenological kinds of analyses of structures of experience and the rest of it, even they have got to be conducted in and through the use of concepts. But very often they are not self-consciously so conducted. For Wittgenstein the point is to be maximally self-conscious about the use of one's concepts in analyzing experiences, and in analyzing the phenomena one has an interest in. Moreover, just a third quick point, though experience is prior to conceptualization, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, in terms of from the kid to the adult and from the species - we presume there was a pre-linguistic age for the species, and a linguistic age - analytically conceptualization is prior to experience, for Wittgenstein. What that means is that whilst people can be said to have experiences before they have any language - of course, a child can have pain before it can know that it has pain, or that it's pain that it has - that requires conceptualization - though experiences are prior, analytically or logically conceptualization is prior in the sense that what experience amounts to, what the experiences are experiences of, and all of that, is only available in and through the medium, or the mediation of concepts. So, whereas the phenomenological tradition, particularly as a philosophy of consciousness, wants us to focus primarily upon experience, and it seems that Wittgenstein wants us to focus primarily upon conceptualization and language-games, in fact, Wittgenstein, as Hacker wants to argue, is just as much interested in experience as the phenomenologists, except what he's now got to look at are the instrumentalities of access.

Eileen Crist: Wittgenstein is making a much stronger claim isn't he. Language and experience are inseparably tied. You experience the world through language. {JC: yup} And possibly there's no other way for humans who have already acquired language to experience the world. Husserl says that you use language to put your thoughts in so there is some kind of distance between language and thought, and Wittgenstein just takes that distance completely away.

Jeff Coulter: There's no gap. Exactly. He says things like: Ok, if you want to insist you have wordless thoughts about things, you can wordlessly think about things, then how can you know that 'x' is the correct translation of your wordless thoughts into words? He's always trying to remove the gap. There's no question about that.

Isamu Kamada: Then why is he a social constructionist? If language is the world itself it is not social construction, it is just nature itself?

Jeff Coulter: I'm holding that one while I look up a quote. We'll come back to that.

Paragraph 370 of the PI is helpful here:

370. One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word "imagination" is used. But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words. For the question as to the nature of the imagination is as much about the word "imagination" as my question is. And I am only saying that this question is not to be decided -- neither for the person who does the imagining, nor for anyone else -- by pointing; nor yet by a description of any process. The first question also asks for a word to be explained; but it makes us expect a wrong kind of answer.

And this is part of his general principle for converting ontological questions into logico-grammatical ones. He says: The question "what is the meaning..." or "what is the grammar of the concept of 'imagination'?" is the SAME THING as asking "What is imagination?". Except putting it in the linguistic mode, or the conceptual mode alerts us that what we need is a conceptual inquiry, at least first. Putting it in the material mode first might lead us to scurry along doing experiments, and researches without first having clarified what we could possibly be meaning, what we could be talking about. And we can go WRONG if we're not clear about the logical grammar of these concepts. So he's saying: No, I'm not -- one of old saws about Wittgenstein is he's interested in words and-

[Tr: brief interruption from the rest of the world]

Jeff Coulter(cont.): One of the old saws about Wittgenstein, particularly from people like Ernest Gellner in WORDS AND THINGS, that I have very reluctantly put on your book list, is that he says things like: Look, Wittgenstein is interested in words and not the world, and he wants us to

become lexicographers instead of analysts. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's a total misunderstanding of the semantico-pragmatic transformation on ontological questions.

Isamu Kamada: But he is saying that sensation is something very private, and we can refer to sensation, but sensation itself is different from the language, the term, {JC: of course}, and if we say that he's in pain we judge from his pain behavior, but the term sensation itself is not referring to his pain behavior, but his sensation itself. But what is his sensation? It is inaccessible for us because it's very private. So there is a kind of gap between the world and his own experience. And he said just forget about his experience, just look at the language-game, it's enough.

Jeff Coulter: No, no. Don't forget when he says the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant, it's not that-

Isamu Kamada: Because he says it's like a beetle in a box, we cannot see it. How we can use the word because it is different from beetle, because there is pain behavior. Therefore we can refer to it.

Jeff Coulter: Isamu, to give that a full answer requires that we go over again the private language argument, which we've done. So what I'll do is postpone that until you've seen the transcript of that class. Ok? {IK: yes} Read through the transcript of that class on Wittgenstein on pain and private sensations, and all the rest of it, and then we'll take it up again. I promise. But let me postpone it for now. {IK: Yeah, Ok} We've only a few more minutes, and it requires going over all of that ground. But we'll come back to it.

Let me back you up to the last thing you asked, and that will be the last question for the class, Ok. What's it got to do with social constructionist thought, given there's no gap, given that he's talking about THE WORLD. There's a sense in which to speak of these inquiries as social constructionist can be misleading. And if I've contributed to that degree of misleadingness by the title of my book THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MIND {IK: yes}, to that effect I'm guilty as well. But, it's like a gloss on a collection of themes. The way I see is not a sort of doctrine. It says the following kind of thing - and Wittgenstein

never used the expression at all, social construction - but what it points to is the fact that first of all language and the concepts that it expresses are social phenomena, par excellence. Language acquisition and use are social processes. Conceptualization is therefore intersubjective. Intelligibility is intersubjective. And I believe Wittgenstein was one of the most systematic logicians to see that. And it's that, more than Schutz, more than Husserl, more than Parsons, more than many traditions in sociology, that established that technically for us, and give us our intellectual core as a discipline: that intelligibility is intersubjective and now the issue is HOW does it work. How does the human conceptual apparatus get put to work? What is the grammar? How does it work in the different domains of praxis? He's a praxiologist. And, in a sense, what I want to do, and what people who think like me want to do, is to, and I think the philosophers would be happy that we did this, because they really don't much like him given that he's considered the ANTI-philosopher, - I think he's a classical sociological theorist. Sociologos, in that sense, in the sense of socioLOGY. He establishes the socially organized nature of intelligibility, of meaning, of language, of also the mind, in the sense of the various components of understanding, intending, these are praxiological phenomena. And, to that extent, I would want to include him in the pantheon of our ancestors.

On which point, we'll quit.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

These transcriptions were prepared from an audio recording, the auditory quality of which was not always optimal. Participating members, especially Jeff Coulter, have reviewed initial drafts of the transcripts and have attempted to clarify portions that were particularly difficult to hear, and also provided assistance in correcting errors in transcription that were made during the production of the first draft of each session. The generous assistance of all those involved is gratefully acknowledged. Particular appreciation goes out to Jeff Stetson who took on

the laborious task of copy-editing. Unfortunately, not all errors in transcription, and not all inaudible portions could be corrected given the time lag in producing the transcriptions. The transcriber apologizes for any remaining typographical errors.

The following are conventions employed in producing the transcriptions of these meetings:

- [x] square brackets: Text in square brackets is for the most part that of the transcriber. Such text is indicated by "Tr:" at the beginning of the brackets. It includes: 1. paraphrases of talk, 2. clarification of indefinite references, for example pointing, drawing or writing on the chalk-board, producing a behavioral display etc., 3. information about references to texts referred to in the talk, 4. other general remarks and clarifications and 5. indications of omissions and tape changes. PLEASE NOTE that there is almost always some bit of talk missing at the points of tape change. On occasion, comments in square brackets are insertions offered by those who have edited the text and are indicated as such by the initials of the person in question, e.g., [JC: xxxxxxxx]. Also, if additions or deletions are made in text quoted during the class, then these changes are noted in square brackets, with the speakers initials included within the brackets.
- { x } braces: Text in braces is the talk of persons who are commenting on or responding to the talk of another person who currently has the floor. This talk is introduced by the initials of the person making the remark and/or comment, e.g., {JC: xxxx}.
- (x) parentheses surrounding text: Text in parentheses is the transcriber's best guess as to what was being said when there is some doubt about exactly what was said due to the poor auditory quality of the tape.
- () empty parentheses: Parentheses containing no text indicate a portion of the talk which is not transcribable due to the poor auditory quality of the tape, although it is possible to tell that something was being said.

CAPITALIZATION: Capitalization is used to indicate titles (or partial titles, e.g.: INVESTIGATIONS for the PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS) for books. It is also used to indicate vocal emphasis by the speaker in question, i.e., something which is spoken noticeably louder, or with more emphasis than the surrounding talk. It was not possible to underline text in the editing/text-formating system employed, which is why capitalization rather than underlining was used in the above cases. This also influenced

the formating of terms in languages other than English, e.g.: Übersicht, vis-a vis, etc, which are neither capitalized, nor underlined, although occasionally are explicated in square brackets following the text in question.